

### **Swan Lake Visitors Center**

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### ***The King's Highway...***

...runs from Charleston up through Sumter County. But for the slaves who were transported into South Carolina along this route, there was nothing royal about their circumstances. They worked hard, tilling the soil and supplying the labor that provided grand lifestyles for their masters back in the days when cotton was king. These were the men and women who helped Sumter District to become among the wealthiest areas of the state, with magnificent plantation homes, bustling commerce, active churches and an opulent way of life that we today can only imagine.

Today, these humble souls are at rest, often in forlorn graves under moss-hung trees in the rural reaches of the county. They lived in difficult times, but never lost the hope of a better life for their descendants. Through love and discipline, they passed down to their children the valuable traits of determination, hard work, a commitment to education and most importantly, the certainty that a better day would come.

From William "April" Ellison, who rose from the shackles of slavery to the landed gentry--to Mary McLeod Bethune, who traveled from the Mayesville cotton fields to the White House--to Bill Pinkney, the WWII veteran whose musical talent brought Carolina "beach music" to the world and helped define an era--to Freddie Solomon, who tucked a football under his arm and ran with it into the record books --to James Clyburn and Ernest Finney, Jr., who continue to influence laws and public policy in the new millennium... Sumter's African-Americans have spent the last two centuries in a fearless quest for respect, prosperity and the basic right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" set down by the founding fathers of our nation.

The King's Highway has been eclipsed by superhighways. Many of the plantation homes are gone or fallen into disrepair. Industry has replaced cotton as the backbone of Sumter's economy. But in the journey of the proud African-American race, these less traveled roads were those that led to the fulfillment of their dreams and goals.

Join us now, as we travel through almost 250 years of change and celebration.



### 1. Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial Park

*Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune Road, Lee County*

Mary McLeod Bethune's entire long life was marked by her complete commitment to education. Born in 1875, she became founder of Bethune-Cookman College, special adviser to four US Presidents including Franklin D. Roosevelt, president of the National Association of Colored Women, founder of the National Council of Negro Women, consultant for the chartering of the United Nations--her accomplishments would be remarkable for anyone, but are astounding when viewed against the background of her humble circumstances and the racial climate of the times. Mrs. Bethune was honored with a US Postage Stamp in 1985 and was the first African-American named to the SC Hall of Fame. In 1974, a memorial to her was unveiled at Lincoln Park in Washington, DC. For more information, call (803) 453-5860. Directions: US 76 to Mayesville. Turn left on Hwy. 154; drive approx. 2 miles to Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune Rd. and follow signs.



### 2. Mayesville Institute

*Institute Street, Mayesville*

The school known as Mayesville Institute has a singular history in the annals of Sumter

County. It was founded by Miss Emma J. Wilson, the daughter of a slave, whose desire to learn forever changed the face of education for African-American children in the area. Miss Wilson attended Goodwill Parochial school and completed her education at Scotia Seminary in Concord, NC. Under Miss Wilson's leadership, an abandoned gin house and borrowed books grew into a six-building compound on a working farm of 122 acres known as Mayesville Educational and Industrial Institute. The school, chartered in 1896, was informally known in the area as "little Tuskegee." One of Miss Wilson's pupils, particularly devoted to her teacher and with a strong desire to emulate her accomplishments, was a young girl by the name of Mary McLeod. Mayesville Elementary School is located on the site of Mayesville Institute, and Miss Wilson is buried on the school grounds. *View from outside.*



### 3. Goodwill Presbyterian Church

*Highway 527, Mayesville*

The first African- American Presbyterian Church in Sumter County, Goodwill was organized in 1867 by 100 black members of Salem Black River Presbyterian Church. The first church on this site was erected in 1868. The Manse was built in 1890. Although the sanctuary was severely damaged by Hurricane Hugo in 1989, it has since been restored and Goodwill Presbyterian remains an active part of the rural Sumter County community. The Goodwill Parochial (Day) School is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. View from outside; open on Sundays. (803) 495-3599. Directions: From US 76, turn right.



### 4. Emmanuel United Methodist Church

*421 South Main Street, Sumter*

Emmanuel United Methodist Church was organized in 1866 as a "bush arbor" church, in a shed built with poles and covered with moss, on land purchased by the

Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. First pastored by the Reverend B. Frank Whittemore, the church had seen 15 members join the ordained ministry by 1890. The present sanctuary, completed in 1901, is the oldest church building of any denomination in the city of Sumter. View from outside; open on Sundays. (803) 773-6197.



### 5. Job's Mortuary

*312 South Main Street, Sumter*

The Reverend Harry Bowman Brown (1893-1964) made

a large and lasting impact on those around him. Sumter's African-American community still benefits from his philanthropic efforts, including providing low-cost housing for those in need and assisting with the building of a number of churches. He was the founder of Sons and



Daughters of Job, a benevolent and charitable organization that at one time boasted 10,000 members. The Reverend Mr. Brown owned and published the *Samaritan Herald* newspaper, and gave the land on which the Community Hospital was built in 1949. The hospital served Sumter's black citizens until 1964, when it became the Community Nursing Home (Broad Street). Job's Mortuary was established in 1935, and has occupied its current building since 1959. *View from outside; for information, call 773-3323.*



**6. First Baptist Missionary Church**  
*Washington & Dingle Streets, Sumter*

First Baptist Missionary Church was organized in 1868 as Shiloh Baptist Church, the first African-American church of this denomination in the city. The first church on this location was originally built in 1910, burned in 1962 and was renovated later that year. The present building was erected in 1977. The church was the scene of the founding of the State Baptist Education and Missionary Convention of South Carolina (1877), and founded Morris College in 1908. First Baptist also developed Shiloh-Randolph Manor, a senior citizens' community, in 1978. It was partially named for the Reverend Dr. William Randolph, a former member of Sumter's City Council and the city's longer-serving Mayor Pro Tempore. *View from outside; open on Sundays. (803) 775-1462.*



**7. Church of the Good Shepherd**  
*401 Dingle Street, Sumter*

Among the many churches in Sumter County, the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd has one of the most unique and interesting histories. It was originally built on the Frierson plantation as St. John's Chapel, where slaves were given

religious instruction. In 1886, John Frierson transferred the property to a man named Bowen, who moved the building to Highway 261, where it was known as the Bowen Church. It was later used as a school. The building was purchased by members of the Good Shepherd Episcopal Mission. In 1920, this group moved the foundation and framing to the corner of Dingle and Wright streets to use in the construction of

the Church of the Good Shepherd, which remains in use to the present day. *View from outside; open on Sundays. (803) 775-5619.*



**8. Walker Cemetery**  
*West Oakland Avenue, Sumter*

Located adjacent to the Sumter, St. Lawrence and

Jewish Cemeteries, Walker Cemetery is the final resting place of many distinguished African-Americans. Among the notables interred here are Dr. and Mrs. C.W. Birnie, and Z.E. Walker (1849-1916), elected in 1883 as Sumter's first black City Councilman, for whom the cemetery is named. The Walker Cemetery Association was organized on January 24, 1895. Visitors will note many familiar names of families and individuals who played a significant role in the history of Sumter County, including Savage, Bultman, Kilgo, Weston and others. Some areas of the privately-owned cemetery are in a state of disrepair, but numerous individuals in the community have expressed an interest in restoration and preservation efforts.



**9. Lincoln School**  
*Council Street, Sumter*

The Lincoln Graded School was founded in 1874 as a grade school for Sumter's African-

American elementary students, and became part of Sumter School District #17(now part of Sumter School District) in 1889. By 1929, the original four-room structure had been expanded in size and served students up to graduation from the 11th grade. Following integration, Lincoln High School merged with Edmunds High School in 1969 to become the Council Street campus of Sumter High School, and remained in use as such until the completion of the new Sumter High School in 1983. Since then, the building has served as St. Jude High School, the Sumter Catholic High School and Sumter Academy. It is now known as the Trinity Lincoln Center, and contains the offices of Trinity United Methodist Church's Shepherd's Center, along with the Salvation Army Boys & Girls Club and other offices. *View from outside.*



### 10. Former Law Office of Finney & Gray

110 South Sumter Street,  
Sumter

Ernest A. Finney, Jr. holds a particular distinction as the first African-American Chief Justice of the South Carolina State Supreme Court, a position he held from 1994 until his retirement in 2000. Finney moved to Sumter with his family in 1960 and earned a reputation as an exemplary defense lawyer and civil rights advocate, defending nearly 6,000 protesters during the 1960's. This office housed the practices of Judge Finney and Ruben L. Gray, Sr., who later became a Third Circuit Family Court Judge, and today houses the law practice of Finney's son, Ernest A. Finney, III, who presently serves as Solicitor of South Carolina's Third Judicial Circuit. *Please view from the street.*



### 11. Morris College

100 West College Street,  
Sumter

Morris College opened in 1908 as Sumter's first and only historically black college. Operated by the Baptist Educational and Missionary Convention of SC, the college originally provided three levels of training in education, adding the Bachelor of Arts program in 1915. Today, BA, BFA, BS and BSE degrees are offered in numerous fields. One of the few senior colleges built and operated solely under African-American auspices, Morris College is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and is a member of the United Negro College Fund. *For more information, please call (803) 934-3200.*



### 12. Church of the Holy Cross

Highway 261, Stateburg

The Episcopal Church of the Holy Cross is one of Sumter County's most interesting and historic buildings. Constructed of pise de terre, or rammed earth, it is a beautiful representation of the Victorian Gothic

style. The building was consecrated in 1852. Prior to 1852, Claremont Episcopal Church was located on this site. In accordance with local custom, slaves and free people of color sat in the

upstairs gallery during services. In 1824, this tradition changed forever with the announcement by the church vestry that William Ellison and his family would henceforth be permitted a place on the main floor, in a bench under the organ in the rear of the church. By 1844, the Ellisons had been granted a subscription to occupy pew #30, paying the same \$35 fee as their wealthy white neighbors. The Church of the Holy Cross was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1978. *Open on Sundays; for more information please call (803) 494-8101.*



### 13. William Ellison Home & Ellison's Graveyard

Highway 261 at Old Garner's Ferry Rd., Stateburg

Born a slave in 1790, William "April" Ellison went on to become one of South Carolina's most respected citizens. He perfected the cotton gin invented by Eli Whitney,

and enjoyed such success that by 1816, he had purchased his freedom and that of his family, and became the wealthiest free African-American in South Carolina. In 1838, he purchased the home of Governor Stephen D. Miller, later became a member of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Cross and continued until his death as a successful manufacturer of gins, gin saws and other farm equipment. The Ellison home is now owned by noted artist Grainger McKoy. Ellison's graveyard, located near his home, is the "family burying ground" where William Ellison and his descendants remain. *Directions: Ellison home—Highway 261; home located on left, 2nd house from end before intersection of Old Garner's Ferry Road. Cemetery—Turn left; cemetery is on right. Home is privately owned; please view from the highway.*



### 14. Rafting Creek Community

Highway 261 North

Since the turn of the 20th century, the African-American community of the Rafting Creek area has left a quiet but lasting impression on events that shaped the lives of our African-American leaders today. Rafting Creek

Baptist Church was founded in the 1860's by

the Reverend Theodore B. Diggs (1835-1928), also a leader in the establishment of the Rafting Creek School on the church property. The present Rafting Creek Church, Rafting Creek School, Greater Township Community Center and Wright's Cemetery are located on lands from the estate of Thomas Boston Wright (1877-1925). Rafting Creek School is the site of one of the earliest Rosenwald Schools in Sumter County. The schools were built throughout the South between 1912 and the 1930's by Julius Rosenwald, a Jewish-American philanthropist whose interest in the education of young black people developed as a result of his friendship with Booker T. Washington. He built no fewer than 14 schools in Sumter County, in partnership with the communities they served. Residents were required to obtain land and contribute toward construction costs. Rafting Creek school was built in the 1920's to serve more than 100 students in the area. The community's efforts were led by T.B. Wright's widow, Dr. Marion Woodard Wright McLester (1895-1994). When the original school burned in 1943, she personally petitioned President Franklin D. Roosevelt for federal funds, and the new school was completed in 1955. Dr. McLester also worked with Morris College for over 70 years. She was a strong advocate for Civil Rights, which remained, along with the education of African-American children, a lifelong priority.



### 15. High Hills Baptist Churches

*Meeting House Road, Stateburg*



A traveler on Meeting House Road, off the King's Highway, might be surprised to see two churches, both named High Hills Baptist. The white frame structure belongs to one of the oldest churches in Sumter

County, established in 1772. In 1774, Richard Furman was named pastor; he later founded Furman University in Greenville. The present building was erected in 1803 on land granted by General Thomas Sumter, for whom the City and County of Sumter are named. The brick church down the road is home to the congregation formed in 1869 by the freed men and women of the original High Hills Baptist Church. The present structure of the second High Hills Baptist Church was renovated in 1983 under the leadership of the Reverend E.W. Palmer. The

adjacent cemetery, heavily draped with wafting plumes of Spanish moss, overlooks a spectacular vista of the High Hills of the Santee, for which the churches were named. The stones date from the early 20th century. *Directions: From Hwy. 261, turn onto Meeting House Road. View from outside. For more information on High Hills Baptist (1772), call (800) 688-4748*



### 16. Willie "Bill" Pinkney Community Park

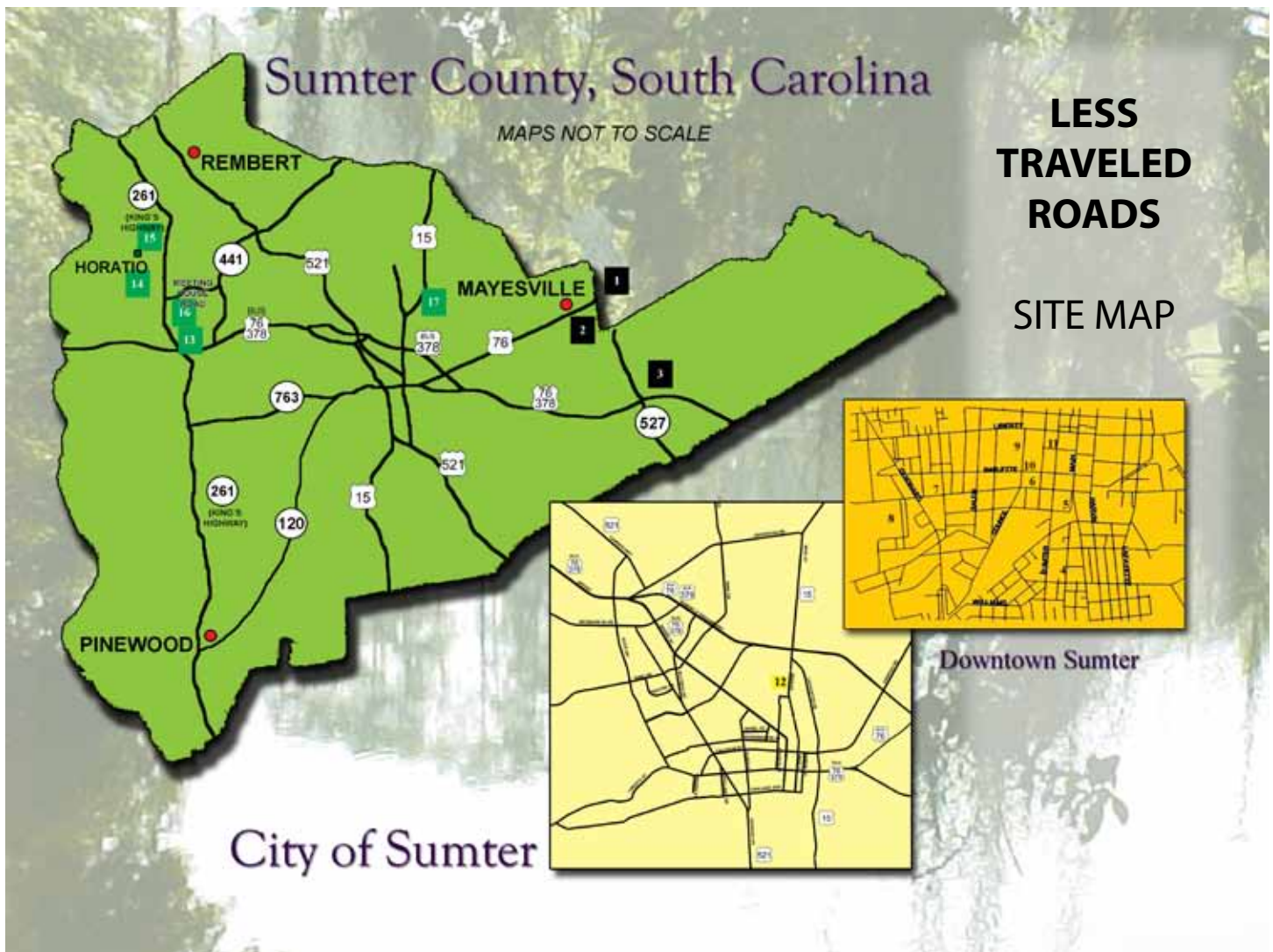
*Hwy 521S at Queen Chapel Road, Dalzell*

Located near his birthplace in the town of Dalzell, the park is dedicated to Bill Pinkney (1925-2007), a Sumter County native best known worldwide as singer for the original Drifters, who recorded the timeless classics "White

Christmas," "Up on the Roof," and "Under the Boardwalk." Mr. Pinkney was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988 and received numerous awards for his contributions in the world of music. In addition to his musical accomplishments, he also served during World War II, earning four Bronze Stars, and was formerly a pitcher for the New York Blue Sox baseball team. Bill Pinkney has received the Order of the Palmetto, South Carolina's highest civilian honor. The State of South Carolina recognizes May 14 as "Bill Pinkney Day."







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